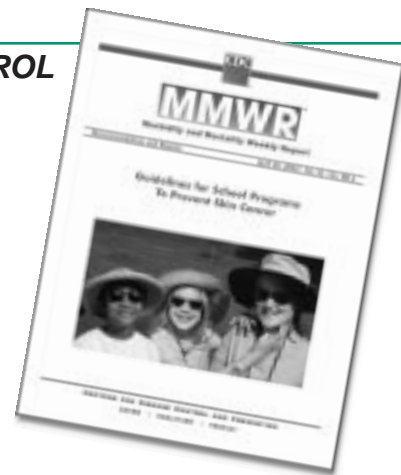


Skin Cancer: Preventing America's Most Common Cancer



The Burden of Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. The three major types of skin cancer are the highly curable basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas and the more serious malignant melanoma. The American Cancer Society estimates that during 2003, about 1 million new cases of basal cell or squamous cell carcinoma and about 54,200 new cases of malignant melanoma will be diagnosed. It is also expected that

skin cancer will claim the lives of approximately 9,800 Americans.

Exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays appears to be the most important environmental factor involved in the development of skin cancer. When used consistently, sun-protective practices can prevent skin cancer. UV rays from artificial sources of light, such as tanning beds and sunlamps, are as dangerous as those from the sun and

should also be avoided. Although both tanning and burning can increase a person's risk for skin cancer, most Americans do not consistently protect themselves from UV rays. A recent survey sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that approximately 43% of white children under age 12 had at least one sunburn during the past year.

National Leadership from CDC

CDC provides leadership for nationwide efforts to reduce illness and death caused by skin cancer. Although these efforts comprise a variety of approaches and strategies, their common focus is education and prevention. CDC's major approaches to skin cancer prevention and education are described below.

Disseminating Recommendations

To disseminate information about the importance of minimizing UV exposure during childhood, CDC published "Guidelines for School Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer"

in CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Research and Recommendations Report*. Intended to help state and local education agencies and schools play a role in reducing unsafe sun exposure, this publication includes recommendations on

- Establishing policies that reduce exposure to UV radiation.
- Maintaining an environment that supports sun-safety practices.
- Providing health education to students.
- Involving students' families.
- Training health care professionals.
- Evaluating school skin cancer prevention programs.

Who Is at Risk?

Although anyone can develop skin cancer, some people are at particular risk. Risk factors include

- Light skin color, hair color, or eye color.
- Family history of skin cancer.
- Personal history of skin cancer.
- Chronic exposure to the sun.
- History of sunburns early in life.
- Certain types of moles, or a large number of moles.
- Freckles, which indicate sun sensitivity and sun damage.



The guidelines are available on CDC's Web site at http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/mmwr_rr.html.

CDC continues to work with other federal agencies and the independent Task Force on Community Preventive Services to review studies of community-based interventions targeting skin cancer prevention. Recommended interventions are published in the *Guide to Community Preventive Services*. This publication, available on-line at <http://www.thecommunityguide.org>, describes proven strategies that communities can use as they plan and implement programs to prevent skin cancer.

Working with Schools

In January 2002, CDC and the American Cancer Society sponsored "From Guidelines to Action: Skin Cancer Prevention in Schools," a forum that included national, state, and local leaders in education, public health, and skin cancer prevention. Participants shared strategies for promoting awareness of skin cancer prevention among students, parents, school administrators, and staff. Building on information shared at this forum, CDC's Division of Cancer Prevention and Control is developing communication tools for adaptation by education partners to increase awareness, formulate policy, and enhance the school environment for skin cancer prevention.

In April 2002, CDC released the EXCITE Skin Cancer Module, an instructional package designed to help high school students learn about skin cancer epidemiology. The module is part of a collection of teaching materials that introduce students to public health and epidemiology. More information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/excite>.

"Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: Part II—Sun Safety" was published by the National Association of State Boards of Education in November 2002. This new addition to the association's school health policy guide is based on CDC's "Guidelines for School Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer." It specifies policies

that can be adopted by state education authorities, local school districts, and individual schools to make sun safety a vital, integrated part of coordinated school health programs. The publication addresses broad policy issues and identifies additional sources of information. An executive summary and ordering information can be found at http://www.nasbe.org/HealthySchools/sun_safety.html.

Collecting Data

CDC supports the collection of information on sun-protection behaviors and attitudes and is developing monitoring systems to track national trends in these data. Findings will be used to better target and evaluate skin cancer prevention efforts. During 2003, CDC's National Health Interview Survey and a survey conducted through the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System will include questions about sun-protection behaviors.

Building Partnerships

The National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention is an alliance working to 1) increase skin cancer awareness and prevention behaviors in all populations, particularly those at high risk; 2) develop and support partnerships that extend and reinforce core messages about behavioral change; 3) coordinate national efforts to reduce skin cancer incidence and deaths; and 4) develop a national skin cancer prevention and education plan. CDC is an active member of this council, as well as a member of the Federal Council on Skin Cancer Prevention, which promotes sun-protection behaviors among federal employees, their families, and agency constituents.

Supporting State Initiatives

CDC has funded health departments in four states (Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, and Utah) to implement skin cancer projects. These initiatives are establishing broad-based coalitions, coordinating surveillance systems, and developing and disseminating educational programs for the public and for health care providers.

For more information or additional copies of this document, please contact:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

Division of Cancer Prevention and Control

Mail Stop K-64, 4770 Buford Highway, NE, Atlanta, GA 30341-3717

(770) 488-4751 • Voice Information System 1 (888) 842-6355 • Fax (770) 488-4760

cancerinfo@cdc.gov • <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer>